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General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by Advocates for Youth, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Awaz Centre for Development Services, Center for Health and Gender Equity, Equidad de Genero: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia, Family Care International, Federation for Women and Family Planning, Fundación para Estudio e Investigacion de la Mujer, German Foundation for World Population, International Center for Research on Women, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, International Planned Parenthood Federation, IPAS, Italian Association for Women in Development, Pathfinder International, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Population Action International, Public Health Institute, Red de Salud de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe, Swedish Associatio[illegible] for Sexuality Education, Vaestoliitto — Family Federation of Finland, Women Deliver and Women and Modern World Centre, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development agenda

The organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council participating in this statement welcome the decision of the General Assembly, in its resolution 65/234, to extend beyond 2014 the Programme of Action of the International Conference for Population and Development and the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action, since progress to date has been uneven in some areas and much more remains to be done. It is important, however, that this extension ensure the full implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The full implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights will require full inclusion in the international development agenda moving forward. We are mindful of the experience in 2000 when sexual and reproductive health failed to be included in the Millennium Development Goals and the fact that the omission was not rectified until 2007, with the introduction of the target on achieving universal access to reproductive health (Goal No. 5). We therefore request the Commission on Population and Development to urge that this subject be fully addressed at the 2014 annual ministerial review on addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future, to be held at the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in July. This will provide an opportunity to promote the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development agenda.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are inalienable human rights, indivisible from the others, but they are not recognized as such and still remain a neglected cause in some countries because of their lack of acceptance as a crucial part of an individual's well-being and a central feature of human development. This situation has been further exacerbated by the splitting of the salient features of the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda and by their incorporation, separately, into various development frameworks, thereby diminishing their importance as a development priority in their own right.

We would particularly like to highlight the importance of addressing the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of young people, both in and out of school, who frequently lack access to sexual and reproductive health education, information and services. In many developing countries young people constitute a major portion of the population. Nevertheless, it is often assumed that boys and girls under 18 are too young for comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health information and services; this ignores the realities and environmental factors and keeps young people from acquiring the practical knowledge and skills they need to protect themselves from abuse, exploitation and disease. Lack of knowledge regarding pubertal changes often produces feelings of guilt and confusion among adolescents. This in turn makes young people vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections. These are formative years, and the lack of necessary information and services translates into unhealthy behaviour and uncertainty in the transition to adulthood. Moreover, young people are key to transforming the existing

discriminatory social hierarchy and patriarchal norms and values that are an obstacle to development and to improving the status of women and girls.

While many countries are focusing more and more on women's empowerment, the role of sexual and reproductive health and rights is frequently not adequately addressed. This has contributed to the violation of the rights of women and girls, who have been constrained in making decisions affecting their own lives and have had their life choices reduced. In some countries, contraceptive use is extremely low, especially among married adolescents, and access to safe abortion is limited. Young women and girls are ill equipped to face livelihood-related demands, frequently experiencing domestic violence. High maternal mortality rates cannot be significantly reduced without addressing these root causes.

The often-repeated statement that sexual and reproductive health and rights are integral to poverty eradication and sustainable development needs due recognition in the development agenda. Synergy must be built into the International Conference on Population and Development process beyond 2014 and the post-2015 development agenda in order to devise stronger and more comprehensive development priorities for the coming years. This is a message that should also be forwarded to the annual ministerial review.

It was in Cairo that the linkages between population, poverty, health, education and the rights of individuals were forged. We must ensure that those linkages are not lost in the post-2015 development agenda and the process of adopting sustainable development goals.